



TeleState

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Congress Sends ITA- Backed Broadband Measure to President

After working at the state level over the past few years to shift policymakers' thinking about the role of government in broadband deployment, the Illinois Telecommunications Association began working in conjunction with U.S. Senator Dick Durbin on a federal measure designed to encourage broadband deployment. That measure, the Broadband Data Improvement Act contained in S 1492, was recently sent to the President for his signature.

"Our members understand that, while government has a legitimate role in incenting the development of broadband throughout the state and nation, the public role should also focus on maximizing future infrastructure deployment by working with consumers and community groups to educate them about the applications of high speed Internet," said Doug Dougherty, president of the Illinois Telecommunications Association. "When the public demand exists for broadband deployment, the private sector can invest in the appropriate infrastructure expansion. This federal measure mirrors what we outlined in Illinois to encourage broadband deployment."

Specifically, the federal bill contains language encouraging state initiatives that improve broadband access. Grants would be awarded to:

- Provide a baseline assessment of broadband deployment in the state;
- Identify barriers to the adoption by individuals and businesses of broadband and information technology services;
- Create and facilitate in each county or designated region of the state a local technology planning team with members representing a cross-section of the communities or region;
- Work collaboratively with broadband service providers to encourage deployment and use through aggregation or demand and market intelligence.

"The parameters that the State and now the federal governments have set forth for encouraging broadband deployment will work effectively, we believe, to develop the usage that will drive deployment," Dougherty said. "Both the state and the federal government are putting grant dollars into building cooperative networks of groups that can help educate consumers about the economic impact of applications that are possible only with broadband access. This is an exciting time for us."

Verizon Supports Rural Health Care

A recent \$25,000 investment with Jefferson County Comprehensive Services (JCCS) from the Verizon Foundation is having a huge impact on the way health care is delivered in rural southern Illinois.

Located in Mt. Vernon, JCCS serves a rural area, providing services that foster improved quality of life for persons with mental health concerns, disabilities, aging needs, addictions and functional limitations. Unfortunately, according to Dr. Lori Schmider, director of mental health services at JCCS, the region has had no access to psychiatric services since the only two psychiatrists in the region recently retired.

As a result, psychiatric services have been delivered by a visiting psychiatrist who travels 300 miles to the area to provide counseling two Saturdays each month – a less than ideal solution. To deal with this significant problem, JCCS earlier this year asked Verizon to help support a model that would use broadband technology to deliver medical services to the region and to bring psychiatric care to persons in Jefferson County.

According to Dr. Schmider, persons with mental illness are not likely to pursue care if it is not readily available and easily accessible. Most persons with mental illness are afraid to leave their community and yet need timely care.

Using guidelines provided by the American Psychiatric Association on telemedicine and standards set by the Illinois Healthcare and Family Services Department, Schmider brainstormed a model with a peer in Chicago to use a telemedicine application to deliver care to clients served in Jefferson and Hamilton counties.

“We have real people with serious medical needs that need to be addressed,” said Schmider. “A colleague of mine in the Chicago area started using telepsychiatry to manage some of the loss of this specialty. Telepsychiatry is very doable, and while it is not the answer to all of our needs, it certainly helps us fill the gap.

“It also makes it easier for us to collaborate with others in the profession,” Schmider added. “Rather than waiting almost two years to find a psychiatrist willing to relocate to the area, we can share professionals and their expertise across the state in real time.”

The investment by Verizon will provide funding for the equipment and technology required to make the program work. The use of broadband will not only enable JCCS to provide services that have been previously unavailable but also will allow the agency to provide more services to more clients.

“Verizon is thrilled to have this opportunity to partner with Dr. Schmider and JCCS,” said Philip Wood, vice president of public affairs for Verizon in Illinois. “We have been active in the ConnectSI initiative for nearly two years, and Dr. Schmider and JCCS are perfect examples of how we can all work together to impact people’s lives in southern Illinois. We have a real opportunity to make a difference in the region through the use of broadband and technology, and we applaud Dr. Schmider’s efforts.”

President's Letter

This summer and fall, the Telecommunications Association has taken on a new role that stretches and expands the association's traditional interaction with government and other community and business leaders. In the past, and as a matter of routine, I have worked with staff and commissioners at the Illinois Commerce Commission, legislators working on issues related to telecommunications and key leaders in executive agencies throughout state government on behalf of the industry. This year, though, my role has changed into one including outreach to multiple staff and policymakers under the auspices of the Governor, the Lieutenant Governor, the General Assembly and other constitutional offices, as well as private sector and not-for-profit leaders in order to try to provide a vision and a bridge for communication amongst all parties to help us all realize our goals on behalf of Illinois consumers.

Specifically, you can read in this issue about the ITA's role in shaping a federal broadband improvement measure that was recently sent to the President. This new Act, like our Illinois legislation, will incent demand for high-speed Internet access by educating consumers about the benefits and applications of this technology. This education should increase awareness of and demand across Illinois for access that will spur build-out on the part of the industry.

We have also initiated a second coordinated effort designed to bring telemedical applications to health providers and consumers throughout the state. Funds have been identified to provide community grants that will foster the development of health information exchange in Illinois and will encourage regional planning for the secure exchange of patient data among physicians, hospitals, labs, pharmacies and clinics in Illinois.

As the economy of our nation and this state suffer through the crisis in our financial system, it is more important than ever that industry and government work together to find and implement creative ways of meeting the needs of our consumers. On behalf of the association, I will continue to work toward that kind of effective cooperation.

Doug Dougherty

Copper Theft Addressed

Theft of copper, a growing concern and financial drain on companies and consumers that rely on copper for delivery of services such as telecommunications or electricity, will now be more effectively policed after the General Assembly gave final approval to House Bill 4668 this fall.

The legislation establishes a regulatory mechanism for tracking metal sales and identifying potential metal theft. The bill represents an agreement between industries that use copper, the scrap metal and the metal recycling industries. It includes the following provisions:

- 1) Mandates that a metal recycler or scrap metal dealer must make an electronic copy of a state issued identification of anyone selling metal valued at more than \$100;
- 2) Gives the Secretary of State the responsibility to investigate recycled metal theft at licensed scrap metal dealers;
- 3) Gives local law enforcement officials the power to investigate metal recyclers accused of accepting stolen metal;
- 4) Increases the penalty for a metal recycler who accepts stolen property; and
- 5) Gives injunctive power to the State's Attorney and the Attorney General to shut down metal recyclers who continue to accept stolen metals.

The legislation was negotiated and agreed upon by all interested parties and approved by the General Assembly. The Governor vetoed the bill, requiring the General Assembly to override the veto in order for the bill to become law. The override was nearly unanimous in both the Illinois House and Senate.

The legislation is effective immediately. A big thanks to the sponsors, Representative Monique Davis and Senator Bill Haine.

ICC Shows Competitive Choices Abundant Here

The Illinois telecommunications industry offers consumers in this state a number of competitive choices with regard to the companies that provide services and the different methods of receiving telecommunications services according to a 2007 report from the Illinois Commerce Commission. The report confirms the telecommunications industry's position that competition is healthy in Illinois and consumers are the beneficiaries.

"For years, we have pointed to growing statistical proof that competition in our industry is healthy and here to stay," said Doug Dougherty, president of the Illinois Telecommunications Association. "The statistics in the commission's latest report provide solid back up for the real experience local exchange carriers have had as they struggle to compete for customers."

The 2007 Annual Report on Telecommunications Markets in Illinois prepared by the ICC staff shows a sharp decline in subscriber phone lines for the incumbent local exchange carriers and a growing percentage of phone lines being provided and served by competitive carriers. In addition, the numbers show that overall land-line subscribers have declined and wireless lines have increased again.

Specifically, incumbent Illinois local exchange carriers (including companies such as AT&T and Verizon) have lost 37.4% of their wireline customers since 2001. In 2007 alone, the lines lost represented 6.6% of the total number of incumbent local exchange carrier customers.

The total number of wireline telephone lines in Illinois served by all types of carriers decreased by nearly 2 million between 2001 and 2007, a 22% overall reduction. At the same time, wireless customer lines have increased to a total of about 9.9 million, more lines than have ever been reported for wireline customers since the ICC began producing these statistical reports.

"Clearly Illinois consumers have the choice not only to switch providers but also to move between different types of technologies for the delivery of their telecommunications services," Dougherty said. "The astonishing wireline losses for incumbent local exchange carriers and the growth of the lines served by competitive providers and the number of wireless lines demonstrate that Illinois is truly competitive."

The current Illinois telecommunications law is set to expire on June 30, 2009, and discussions will begin soon on how that law should be modified.

"It is clear in light of these numbers that policymakers need to loosen or eliminate the regulatory requirements that continue to limit the flexibility of incumbent local exchange carriers," Dougherty said. "We can't afford to hamstring one category of companies with burdensome requirements that will reduce, rather than enhance, competition."



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